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SUBJECT: SNAPSHOT OF MAYSAN - THE INDEPENDENT PROVINCE

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Maysan province, which shares the longest border with Iran, is regarded as the independent province, and the population has a reputation as a self-reliant people who look to their tribal leaders for leadership and guidance. Politically and socially the province is conservative Shia. The local government has been quick to work towards improving life for its citizens. The province is relatively stable in terms of security with almost all of the violence directed at MND-SE forces. There is infighting between the two dominant Islamic parties, OMS, which controls the local government, and Badr Organization, which controls the security forces. The two parties vie for power and influence in what could best be described as a cold war. The province is known as a smuggler's paradise, and although unemployment is high, citizens rely on government employment and farming for income. End summary.

#### STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

12. (U) Maysan province is located in southeastern Iraq, shares a 275 km border with Iran and has a population of 785,000. The capital is Al Amarah (estimated population 420,000), which lies on the banks of the Tigris River. The remainder of the population resides mainly in the towns of Qumayt and Kabir. Shias are approximately 95 percent of the population, with Sunnis composing the remaining 5 percent. The province has 417,273 registered voters and had a 70-80 percent turnout in the January 2005 provincial elections. The illiteracy rate is 35 percent, the third highest rate in Iraq.

13. (U) The annual median household income is 2,759,451 Iraqi dinars (approximately US \$1840) and the median household size is 7 people. The unemployment rate is 23 percent, with the majority of the employed working in the service sector. The average median hourly wage is 1000 Iraqi dinars, and most households report two sources of income. (Note: All statistics except for voter turnout are from the UNDP and Ministry of Planning Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004. End note)

#### POLITICS

14. (U) Local politics in Maysan is dominated by the Al Husayni Thought Forum, essentially a front for the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). The party holds 15 of the 41 seats in the Maysan Provincial Council (MPC), and the remaining 26 seats are divided among 10 other Shia political parties. The United Islamic Front has the second largest representation on the MPC with only six seats. OMS has control of the political situation in the

province and is supported in its endeavors by the Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM) militia. The other Islamic parties with strong influence are the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), whose members ran on the United Islamic Front list, and Badr Organization. Both the Governor, Adil Mahoder Radhi Al Maliki, and the Chairman of the Provincial Council, Abdul Jabbar Waheed, belong to the Al Husayni Thought Forum. The Deputy Governor, Mohan Abdul Allah Al Jabri, who does not wield any power or influence, represents Iraqi Hizbollah, and the Chief of Police, Ismail Arrar Al Majidi (known as Abu Maythem), is from Badr Organization.

15. (U) Of the four southern provinces, Maysan is seen by Coalition Forces as being the best in terms of governance. The Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee is completely Iraqi led with only background support from the Coalition partners. However, the local population does not believe that the MPC is doing enough to improve and provide basic services, and the Governor frequently blames the Coalition for the province's woes. He often claims that the MPC is unable to solve infrastructure problems because the Coalition has not delivered on promised funds. Maysan has long felt ignored and badly treated by the central government, especially during the previous regime. Most recently, the MPC has had to cope with flooding, a possible Avian Influenza outbreak and the popular outcry following the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. The bombing of the mosque coupled with the recent release of a video of British soldiers beating young men on the streets of Al Amarah resulted in significant tension in the local government's relationship with MND-SE. Recent arrests by Coalition Forces have resulted in a spike of attacks against MND-SE targets.

16. (U) Tribes wield considerable power in Maysan, and the traditional Marsh Arab culture is very influential. During the Iran-Iraq war and the subsequent draining of the marshes by Saddam, the citizens of Maysan turned to their tribal leaders for guidance and protection. This position of authority by the tribes continues today. Abdul Kareem Mahod (known as Abu

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Hatim), leader of Iraqi Hizbollah and brother of the former governor, has formed a tribal council to serve as an advisory body for all matters in Maysan. The council held its inaugural conference on March 30 and had 1,000 attendees made up of tribal leaders, clerics, civil society and politicians. Comment: It is unclear what the cooperation mechanisms will be between the MPC and the Tribal Council. Many citizens hope that a power struggle between the two will not ensue and that the council will work strictly as an advisory council to the MPC. End comment.

#### SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

17. (SBU) With OMS in control of local government and Badr in charge of the security forces, skirmishes between JAM and Badr Corps are frequent as they vie for power and influence. Despite the violence that occasionally erupts between JAM and Badr forces, locals consider the province to be relatively safe because civilians are not the target of insurgent activity. The current weapons of choice against Coalition forces are Improvised Explosive Devices believed to come from Iran. Many of the province's criminal elements reside along the border with Iran and in the areas near the marshlands. They engage in smuggling and, when necessary, violence to protect their livelihood.

18. (C) Chief of Police Abu Maythem controls a police force of over 4,200 men, more than double the Ministry of Interior's standards for the province. The police force is hindered by lack of equipment and vehicles. Overstaffing has caused severe payroll issues, which the Chief of Police addresses by paying salaries out of his own pocket with contributions from some local tribal sheikhs. Comment: There is strong speculation that Iran also contributes to the payroll of the Maysan Police Force. End comment.

## ECONOMY

¶9. (U) The primary industries in Maysan are agriculture, fishing and animal husbandry. Agriculture in Maysan centers on wheat, barley, rice, vegetables, dates and fodder crops for livestock. There are four major factories in the province: vegetable oil, sugar cane, plastic and paper. Three of the factories are no longer active due to deterioration of equipment and lack of resources. The vegetable oil industry continues to produce limited by-products including soap, washing powder and cooking oil. Most of the factories were state-owned and continue to pay wages to their employees even though the factories are idle. With unemployment at 23 percent, much of the population receives income from government employment or farming. Maysan is a smuggler's paradise, and many people engage in it.

## COMMENT

¶10. (C) Comment: The potential for Maysan to grow economically and become one of the more politically savvy provinces in Iraq is quite high. Often described as the wild west, Maysan is used to handling its own affairs without interference from or dependence on the outside. The population believes that the previous regime was an occupation that has now simply been replaced by MND-SE. The citizens of Maysan were responsible for the ouster of Sadaam's forces prior to the invasion in 2003 and feel entitled to reclaiming their province. Its close proximity to Iran makes Maysan important to watch in terms of infiltration by Iran and the spread of Iranian influence. End comment.

## BIO NOTES ON KEY/INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS

¶11. (C) Governor Adil Mahoder Radhi Al Maliki - The Governor was elected to office in January 2005 on the Al Husayni Thought Forum list. Before entering politics he was an engineer. It is rumored that prior to election to office Radhi was an active participant in JAM and, as Governor, continues to support JAM activities. Upon taking office he appointed various members of OMS to key positions in the local government and is regarded as a key OMS figure in the province. Relations between him and his deputy as well as the Chief of Police are tense. Recently, he has made frequent trips to Najaf in order to seek the support and guidance of Muqtada Al Sadr.

¶12. (SBU) Deputy Governor Mohan Abdul Allah Al Jabri - He won his position in the January 2005 elections on the United Islamic Front list. He wields no power or influence and is relegated to the background. The Deputy Governor has cancer (what type is unknown) and frequently travels to Iran for treatment.

¶13. (C) Chairman of the Provincial Council Abdul Jabbar Waheid Al Ogaili - He was elected from the Al Husayni Thought Forum list in January 2005. He is a member of OMS and uses his membership to wield power and influence. Abdul Jabbar worked in

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the previous regime with youth in Maysan. His relationship with the Governor is currently strained and it is believed that he is angling for power and would like to replace the Governor.

¶14. (SBU) Chief of Police Ismail Arrar Al Majidi (known as Abu Maythem) - He was exiled to Iran during the previous regime and developed strong ties with Badr Organisation while there. Abu Maythem returned to Maysan immediately prior to the invasion with a fighting unit he had established while in Iran. He and his forces reportedly were responsible for retaking Maysan province from Saddam five days before Coalition Forces arrived, bringing him high regard with the people of Maysan. Due to Abu Maythem's popularity, strong personality and tribal support, recent efforts by the MPC and Governor to replace him have been unsuccessful.

¶15. (SBU) Abdul Kareem Mahod (known as Abu Hatim) - He is the brother of the former Governor, Riyad Mahod, and is the head of Iraqi Hizbollah. Abu Hatim has recently formed a tribal council

consisting of Maysan tribal leaders, played a key role in the Marsh Arab revolt in 1991 and was an unsuccessful candidate in 2005 on the 169 List for the National Assembly.

¶16. (SBU) Hussein Jaloob Al Saady (known as Abu Muslim) - He returned to Maysan from Iran as the head of the Islamic Da'wa Movement following the fall of Saddam. He studied in Qom for many years and has good contacts in Najaf. Abu Muslim was a member of the Interim Iraqi National Council from September 2004 to March 2005. He did not win a seat in the January 2005 elections and instead turned his attention to his NGO, Al Huda Foundation for Strategic Studies, in Maysan. The foundation educates people on democracy via workshops, providing Internet access and books and by research papers on various topics.

¶17. (C) Sayeed Mohammed - A recent rumored shift in the OMS leadership in Maysan has Sayeed Mohammed, a moderate, taking the political reins of the party. Muqtada Al Sadr reportedly made the decision to change the leadership with the concurrence of the Governor.

¶18. (C) Sa'ad Amar Al Battat - He reportedly recently lost the leadership of JAM in the province. All that is known of his replacement is that he goes by the name "Al'lah". Al Battat is part of a hard line element within JAM that wields influence and leadership in certain circles and will continue to do so even if he has been replaced. Al Battat was held by U.S. forces in 2004 following the Al Sadr uprising in Najaf. Many moderates in OMS/JAM have often lamented his release from custody by U.S. forces.

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